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Widening I-10 a short-term fix

Usage of southwest Valley stretch of freeway is expected to more than double by 2030

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Financial quarreling over widening Interstate 10 has been shelved, and the state says construction crews are on target to start work in the southwest Valley early next year.

But adding lanes to the freeway through Avondale and Goodyear is not expected to be a long-term solution to commuter nightmares, especially as the southwest Valley's population swells.

The freeway in that area narrows from three lanes to two each way. The acceleration, which is on track after the State Transportation Board approved its costs Friday, will bring the number of lanes to five in each direction.

Yet, the number of drivers who use the road is expected to more than double in the coming decades.

On average, 115,000 vehicles drove daily on I-10 between Loop 101 and Sarival Avenue in 2005, state Department of Transportation figures show.

By 2030, 258,000 vehicles are expected to pass that same 8-mile stretch. The estimate even accounts for traffic that will be diverted to I-10 relievers in the southwest Valley, Arizona 801 and Loop 202.

"These are improvements, but you won't hear these classified as solutions," ADOT spokesman Timothy Tait said, referring to the widening.

A comparison of Valley traffic volume shows about 236,000 vehicles travel I-10 at the Broadway Curve daily. About 226,000 pass on I-10 at 35th Avenue near Interstate 17.

Kellyann Smith was trudging through I-10 traffic Friday afternoon on her way home to Goodyear after visiting family in the north Valley.

The drive, which should have taken her 25 minutes, was drawn out to 40 minutes.

She hopes the widening will reduce congestion.

"It took me an eternity," Smith, 35, said. "I was even in the carpool lane. I looked at my watch and thought, I should have been home by now."

In preparing for the expansion, the department did not calculate how long it takes to travel that stretch of I-10 during rush hour or the average speed during rush hour because "the need is clear" for more lanes, Tait said.

Bickering among Avondale, Goodyear and Litchfield Park ended Thursday when the cities compromised on how to split up interest costs that have to be paid to bump up construction by four years.

The State Transportation Board sealed the agreement at a special meeting Friday.

Now, ADOT is getting ready to advertise the project to contractors. Construction on the \$153 million expansion could start at the beginning of next year and last until 2010.

Progress in the cities' negotiations picked up after ADOT told them their I-10 project would be put on hold for about two months unless a financial agreement was reached by Monday.

That's because ADOT did not want the I-10 expansion to hold up two projects on Interstate 17 in the north Valley.

The state does not want to ask for bids on multiple large projects at the same time because some contractors may bid on only one project, and the state may not get the lowest price, Tait said.

Republic reporter Allison Denny contributed to this article.